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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of online poetry learning and examined whether supplementary Web sites could be used as online course tools. Participants were college students at Taiwan's Wenzao Ursuline College enrolled in a course entitled "Concise English Poetry Appreciation and Recitation." The experimental group included students who, besides working in class with the teacher, worked in small groups within the computer language lab during one hour of class, receiving online learning guidance. They used a teacher-made Web site, ALELA: POETRY and the professionally designed BLACKBOARD as online learning instruments. The online guidance allowed students to listen to online poetry reading, record their reading, attach their voice to the files for certain topics, and post discussion questions to share their opinions about assigned poems. The control group consisted of students who remained in class working with the teacher during that hour. Data from student surveys and exams indicated that there was no statistical difference between the groups in terms of exam performance (though writing test performance differed significantly when gender was considered). Students showed equal preference for the teacher-made and professionally-designed Web sites, though they were not particularly interested in either. (SM)

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Effectiveness of Online Poetry Learning for EFL Learners

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Multimedia technology has been integrated in poetry teaching for a couple of years in the presenter's institute, a junior college of languages in south Taiwan. In order to investigate the effectiveness of online English poetry learning, the presenter taught a 43-participant class in the academic year of 2001 as the study target and divided them into the experiment group and the control group. The purposes of this study are 1) Is there any significant difference between the two types of poetry learning in terms of learners' perceptions and performances? 2) Can the teacher's website which is used as a supplementary resource become an official online course?

In this paper the presenter introduces how the learners were guided in the first semester in the academic year of 2001 for the preparation of this project. The results of the questionnaires on the learners' intension toward online learning, online learning self-evaluation, learners' performances, and poetry learning activities will be discussed.

Introduction

Since 2000, the writer has integrated her own web site as a supplementary channel in the elective course entitled Concise English Poetry Appreciation and Recitation to help a group of 18-year-old EFL learners acquire poetry. Readers' response approach has been applied in the course (Lin & Sher, 2000). Besides the teacher-made web site, ALELA: Poetry, the writer also used the free version of Blackboard that contained good interactive interfaces to enrich the learning environment for a period of time. In winter of 2001 the institution purchased a courseware platform entitled E-Course established by National Sun Yat-sen University and used widely in Taiwan. Thus, the writer has added one more channel to her instruction to substitute the free Blackboard version.

In order to know the effectiveness of online poetry learning, the writer made a plan to organize her class into two groups: a control group and an experiment group. This paper discusses the purposes of this project, procedures, and findings. The outcome may be regarded as reference to the writer in promoting online poetry learning especially in the aspect of partial online teaching/learning for her institute since the actual online teaching/learning has not been implemented widely in Wenzao.

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Purposes of study

The purposes of this study are two folds: first, to examine the effectiveness of online poetry learning and second, to figure out if the supplementary web sites can be used as the online course tool. The following questions will be investigated: 1) Is there any significant difference between the two types of poetry learning in terms of learners' perceptions and performances? (2) Which types of learning style do students prefer? (3) What are the learners' perceptions to the different courseware platforms? In other words, what are the learners' attitudes towards the teacher-made web sites and the professionally designed education web sites?

Limitations of the Study

A couple of limitations of the study should be considered. First of all, because this course is a two-hour elective course, it might be a challenging demand to ask students to work on different course platforms online at a time. Secondly, while the teacher worked with the control group (twenty students) in the classroom in the first hour, the experiment group (eighteen students) worked in the computer language lab alone. It appeared that the teacher had very little control over the hour. Thirdly, students attended this project voluntarily, but the actual situation of their online learning in the computer language lab was unable to be observed.

Literature Review

Online learning is quite different from the traditional classroom learning. The former will be an optimal choice for lifelong learning. Students with prior experiences of e-learning tend to have a better learning performance (Lin & Chen, 2000). The teacher-made web site which is designed for the needs of the particular subjects in the study provides learners an extra channel to review lessons, explore to selected links, and share their reading as well as opinions whether inside the classroom, computer lab, or outside the classroom. Online reading is a suitable tool to increase cultural knowledge and motivation (Huang, 2001). Technology-enhanced language learning has increased learners' confidence and motivation in language use (Weiss, 1994, Stepp-Greany, 2002). The computer language lab facilitates learners active participation and makes the process of learning more interesting. Students gain confidence in an interactive environment. Additionally, students need to be given tasks while doing online learning, for example, worksheets and note taking (Oladejo,

2001). Features contained in the poetry web site allow learners not only to read poems, enrich language awareness, but also give them different stimuli to interactive communication synchronously and asynchronously. Concerning cyber university e-learning, sex seems to have little effectiveness in learning performance (Lin and Chen, 2000).

Method

Subjects

The subjects of this study were the third-year students of the five-year junior college in Wenzao Ursuline College who took Concise English Poetry Appreciation and Recitation as an elective course in 2001. These students came from different language departments. In the first semester 43 students registered in the course, but in the second semester only 38 remained: 6 male students and 32 female students. In the first semester the whole class worked with the instructor in the classroom and the computer language lab once a week, two hours at a time. In the second semester the students were divided into two groups: 1) the control group consisting of 17 female and 3 male students working with the teacher and 2) the experiment group consisting of 15 female and 3 male students working in groups of three in the computer language lab in the first hour. As to the second hour, the whole group met in the computer language lab and worked with the instructor.

Instruments and Materials

In this project the writer used the teacher-made web site ALELA: POETRY (http://alela.wtuc.edu.tw) and BLACKBOARD (http://www.blackboard.com/courses) as online learning instruments in the first semester. The former was easily accessed with limited interactive functions whereas the latter carried multiple interactive functions but it took time to access. All chapters and exercises were uploaded to both web sites. As the newly installed E-Course server (http://ecourse.wtuc.edu.tw) was promoted in January 2002 and the free-of-charge BLACKBOARD was eliminated in June, 2002, the instructor shifted her data from BLACKBOARD to Wenzao E-Course in the second semester to avoid any unexpected shutdown. Additionally, questionnaires were administered to 1) investigate learners' willingness to participate the project as well as their preference of learning styles, and 2) examine the learners' perceptions towards the course and different course platforms. Besides, the learners' performances in the midterm exam were used to compare the differences between the two groups. SPSS for windows was used in this study.

Procedures

This project lasted for two months starting from the second semester and ending in the midterm examination (March, 2002 ~ May, 2002). In the beginning of the first semester the instructor gave a questionnaire to the subjects as a pre-project survey in order to find out their intension toward online poetry learning. The class received one hour of online learning guidance in a computer language lab conducted by the writer. Students experienced the activities of lectures, discussion, video viewing, reading aloud, and performance in the traditional classroom in the first hour of the class. In the second hour students had a chance to experience technology-enhanced learning activities offered by the writer in the computer language lab. It enabled them to hear the online poetry reading, record their reading with the facilities and attach their voice to the files for certain topics. What's more, they were free to post discussion questions to share their opinions about the assigned poems. Such arrangement aimed to familiarize learners with web-based learning environment and technological application in poetry learning. It also provided a wide resource for students to explore what other people had done in the field of poetry on Internet. At the end of the first semester the writer did a survey to find out the learners' preference and perceptions of the course platforms in addition to their intension of online learning.

In the second semester 38 students stayed in the course and 18 of them showed their willingness to join the online poetry learning. The class was separated into the experiment group and the control group. While the instructor worked with the control group in the classroom in the first hour, the experiment group worked in the computer language lab on their own.

The materials of each chapter the two groups worked on were the same. The experiment group had to read the instructions after they logged in the E-Course. They worked in groups of three to figure out the meanings of the poems, looked up the words in the online dictionary, shared their understanding of poems, wrote the group opinions or answers to the given questions, recorded their read aloud, and completed the weekly questionnaire about their learning.

People working with the instructor in the classroom were also grouped to study the same poems. Students practiced reading poems, commenting on the poems, and acting the poems out with dramatization. The instructor acted as a manager to create an engaging atmosphere for the groups to become active, i.e. willing to be voluntary to earn group credit after group discussion. Furthermore, the instructor also played a role of a facilitator who gave comprehension questions. In the second hour the whole class met again in the computer language lab where audiotapes or compact discs of poem reading and video clips of poetry-related materials, videotapes of poetry variety

show or a collection of previous performances were played. Moreover, the instructor wrote a comprehension quiz under Quiz Star at http://quiz.4teachers.org in addition to the existing exercise pages written by the instructor by using the promising Hot Potato software. Both test features promoted learner's self assessment. The tests saved in the Quiz Star were scheduled to be taken and released in the second hour so that neither group would do the test beforehand. At the end of the second semester a questionnaire was distributed to the experiment group for online learning evaluation and feedback, which was treated as a post-project survey.

Data Analysis and Discussion

In this section the writer introduces data analysis and discussion in terms of pre-project survey, pre-project confirmation survey, post-project survey, preference of course platforms, comparison of midterm examination, and the learners online learning evaluation.

Pre-project Survey In order to investigate learners' intension of taking online poetry class the learners were asked to express their intension in the beginning of the first semester. The first survey, pre-project survey, in Table 1 shows that 98% of the learners thought they would obey the rules in the lab (S4). More than four fifths, 88%, of the students would like to take an online class (S1). As to being punctual in attending the class and submitting homework, 86% of them thought they would be able to make it (S5). Over four fifths, 81%, of the participants thought they would follow the schedule and complete the online tasks in the lab (S3). Almost three quarters, 72%, of the class thought they would join the online discussion at the assigned time (S6). However, only 56% of them thought they would take an online class in the lab without having the instructor (S2).

Pre-project Confirmation Survey At the end of the first semester the participants were given another short questionnaire to reconfirm their willingness to attend the online learning project. The second survey, pre-project reconfirmation survey, in Table 1 indicates that thirty-five participants (92%) assured that they could obey the rules in the lab. More than three quarters of the learners (87%) agreed that they could be on time to the class and join the online discussion at the assigned time. Nearly four fifths of the participants (79%) agreed that they would like to take an online class in the second semester. Twenty-four students (63%) decided that they could follow the schedule and complete the online tasks in the lab. Almost half of the class (47%) confirmed that they could take an online class in the lab without having

the instructor.

Post-project Survey However, when the grouping was made at the beginning of the second semester, only 18 students actually joined the online project and the rest of the 20 students stayed in the classroom working with the instructor. The third survey, the post-project survey, in Table 1 shows the results of the survey of the online poetry learning which took place for two months in the first period of the class. Because of the incomplete work, only 13 out of the 18 participants of the experiment group submitted the survey with available information. As illustrated in the table, the subject number of the first statement remains 18.

Ten out of the class (59%) could take an online class without having the instructor. Thirteen of the class (76%) followed the schedule of the online tasks in the lab. Seven of the class (41%) completed the online tasks in the lab. Twelve of the class (70%) obeyed rules in the lab. Thirteen of the class (76%) were punctual in attending the class and submitting homework. Ten out of the class (59%) joined the online discussion at the assigned time. However, only three of the class (18%) spent much time on working E-course after class.

Table 1 Project surveys: Learners' intension and self evaluation toward online poetry learning

Statements	**N & %**	**1st Survey**		**2nd Survey**		**3rd Survey**	
		Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
1. I'd like to take an online class in the second semester.	N	38	5	30	8	18	20
	%	88%	12%	79%	21%	47%	53%
2. I can take an online class in the lab without having the instructor.	N	24	29	18	20	10	3
	%	56%	44%	47%	53%	59%	17%
3. I can follow the schedule and complete the online tasks in the lab.	N	35	8	24	14		
	%	81%	19%	63%	37%		
3.1 I can follow the schedule of the online tasks in the lab.	N					13	0
	%					76%	0%
3.2 I can complete the online tasks in the lab.	N					7	6
	%					41%	35%
4. I can obey the rules in the lab.	N	42	1	35	3	12	1
	%	98%	2%	92%	8%	70%	6%

5. I can be punctual in attending the class and submitting homework.	N	37	6	33	5	13	0
	%	86%	14%	87%	13%	76%	0%
6. I can join the online discussion at the assigned time.	N	31	11	33	5	10	3
	%	72%	26%	87%	13%	59%	18%
7. I spent much time on working E-course after class (more than I'd expected.)	N					3	10
	%					18%	58%

Take a close look at the table again, it seems that the figures in actual experiment are not equal to the expected figures except Statement 2. In other words, the students thought they could take an online class, complete online tasks, obey rules in the lab, be punctual, and join online discussion, but after the project, the figures went down. Before the project, they did not think they could take an online class without an instructor; nevertheless, the figure went up showing that it was possible for them to do so. Before the project, the participants thought they could follow the schedule and complete the tasks but the challenge seemed to be more than they could handle. This corresponds to what Weiss and Stepp-Greany advocate that online learning increases confidence and motivation. Although they could follow the schedule, they were not able to complete the online tasks. (76% vs. 41%). The last question was designed to find out if the participants spent much time on E-Course after class, and the results showed that only three students said, "Yes". It implies that students might not be satisfied with their attitudes.

Preference of course platforms At the end of the first semester the whole class was given a questionnaire to examine their preference ranking from the most favorable to the least favorable through a five-point Likert scale. Thirty-seven students of the whole class completed this survey. The following table, Table 2, reveals the results of this survey.

During the project, although the class showed equal preference (mean = 2.5) toward the teacher-made web site and the professional educational web site, it seemed that they did not have much interest (ALELA's mean = 3.3; Blackboard's mean = 3.1) in working on either site after class. As to other related activities, the students had little interest in surfing other poetry sites after class (mean = 3.7) or listening to online audio poetry after class (mean = 4.2). Obviously, the subjects did not show much interest in activities after class. The class seemed to like the features of online listening (mean = 2.1) and online audio poetry (mean = 1.9); yet, they showed very little interest in listening to audio poetry in ALELA (mean = 4). As for interactive

online activities, such as online discussion (mean = 2.9), pair reflection (mean = 2.8), online recording (mean = 2.6), or posting work online (mean = 2.6), the class seemed to have similar interest. In order to find out if the learners are fond of using the popular communication tools like e-mail, ICQ, and BBS, the three tools were included in the survey. As shown in the table, students preferred e-mail to the other two styles (mean = 2.6 > 3.4 > 3.5). While working online, students seemed to switch to different sites, especially irrelevant sites (mean = 1.2).

Table 2 Learners' preference towards online course platforms

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
surf ALELA	37	2.5135	0.7311
surf Blackboard	37	2.5135	0.7682
ALELA surf after class	37	3.2973	0.9388
surf Blackboard after class	37	3.1892	0.8768
surf other poetry sites after class	37	3.7027	0.9388
listen to online audio poetry after class	37	4.1622	0.8338
listen to audio poetry in ALELA	37	4.0000	1.1055
online listening: WTUC students	37	2.0541	0.8481
online audio poetry	37	1.8919	0.9063
online discussion	37	2.9459	1.9571
post work online	37	2.6216	0.8929
record reading online	37	2.5946	0.8963
pair reflection online	37	2.7838	0.8542
work on my computer for subjects	37	2.5676	1.1190
email communicate	37	2.6216	1.1390
ICQ communicate	37	3.4324	1.4633
BBS communicate	37	3.5405	1.1449
switch irrelevant sites	37	1.2432	0.4947

Note: 1 stands for the most favorable and 5 stands for the least favorable.

This survey helps the instructor understand that learners like to have convenient devices provided in the web site as a directory or samples; however, they do not make use of the devices so frequently as expected. For example, they showed much more preference in online listening and online audio poetry than listening to online audio poetry after class or listen to audio poetry in ALELA. It implies that downloading might take time. As shown in the preference mean, e-mail may be considered a powerful tool in the instruction. In an interactive technology-enhanced learning, students show more preference in individualized function than in pair work. As illustrated in the table above, posting work online and recording are more favorable than pair reflection online. A big issue in this survey is the switching to irrelevant sites. This may explain why the rate of "obey the rules in the lab" went down in the second survey.

Comparison of midterm examination The midterm examination was analyzed based on gender and learning style. As shown in Table 3, female students tended to have a better performance in the oral test than the male students, and the former seemed to outperform the latter in the written test. In the oral test the mean of the male students is 39.1 and the female's is 40.4. In the written test the mean of the male students is 23.6 and that of the female is 33.0. Obviously, a significant difference ($P < 0.05$) exists between the male and female learners in terms of written test. The finding does not match the statement made by Lin and Chen (2000). This study illustrates that there is no significant difference between female and male participants in the oral test. Nevertheless, significant difference does occur between the male and female students in terms of the written test.

Table 3 Gender's performance toward online poetry learning

Midterm	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	F	Sig. (t-test)
ORAL	male	6	39.1667	3.9707	1.6210	0.471	0.556
	female	32	40.4063	4.7915	0.8470		
WRITTEN	male	6	23.6667	3.7238	1.5202	0.414	0.000
	female	32	33.0313	5.6653	1.0015		

Table 4 reveals that the control group (class) seemed to perform better than the experiment group (lab) both in the oral test and the written test. In the oral test the mean of the control group is 40.5 and that of the experiment group is 39.8. In the written test the mean of the control group is 31.8 and that of the experiment group is 31.2. The value of the t-test is 0.6 and 0.7 respectively. Thus, there is no significant difference between these groups in the midterm examination.

Table 4 Comparison of the learners' performances in the midterm exam

Midterm	Group	N	Mean	S. D.	Std. E.M.	F	Sig. (t-test)
ORAL	class	20	40.5550	4.1355	0.9247	1.095	0.641
	lab	18	39.8333	5.2496	1.2374		
WRITTEN	class	20	31.8500	6.6275	1.4820	0.156	0.767
	lab	18	31.2222	6.2737	1.4787		

After the project the whole class was asked to choose their favorite learning style. Table 5 indicates that 19 students preferred the traditional classroom learning, 13 students chose the online learning, and 6 students desired the both styles. The table shows that there is significant difference among the three types of learning styles in terms of their performances in the oral test. Those who preferred taking the online

learning had the highest mean in the oral test (42.3) followed by the both styles (41.8) and the classroom learning (38.3). As to the written test, those who liked the online learning also had the highest mean (32.5) followed by the both styles (31.3) and the classroom learning (30.9). Significant difference in the oral test of the midterm exam does exist whereas there is no significant difference in the written test of the midterm exam among the three types of learning styles.

Table 5 Learners' performances toward poetry learning styles

Midterm	Style	N	Mean	S. D.	Std. E. M.	F	Sig. (t-test)
ORAL	class	19	38.2632	4.5319	1.0397	3.885	0.030
	lab	13	42.3077	4.4043	1.2215		
	both	6	41.8333	3.1885	1.3017		
WRITTEN	class	19	30.9474	6.3199	1.4499	0.234	0.793
	lab	13	32.5385	7.4119	2.0557		
	both	6	31.3333	4.6762	1.9090		

Learners' online learning evaluation In Table 6 the results of the learners' online learning evaluation revealed the mean of satisfaction ranging from the most satisfied to the least satisfied based on Likert scale 1 to 7. Among the experiment group members, one was absent and one missed filling in the second page of the evaluation. This survey contains the original statements in the pre-project and post-project surveys, E-course activities, and the use of technological tools. The first seven items that are related to the online poetry learning self-evaluation are exactly the same as those appearing in the post-project survey. The order of satisfaction is being punctual in class or submission (mean = 2.6), following online schedule (mean = 2.6), obeying rules (mean = 2.7), taking an online class without the instructor (mean = 2.8), joining online discussion (mean = 2.8), completing online tasks (mean = 3), and working on E-course after class (mean = 3.2). The order of self-evaluation in the post-project survey is to be punctual in attending the class and submitting homework (76%), to follow the schedule of the tasks (76%), to obey rules (70%), to take an online class without the instructor (59%), to join online discussion (59%), to complete the online tasks (41%), and to spend much time on working E-course after class (18%).

The participants reflected that they did not have enough time working online (mean = 5), but they thought the load of online tasks was sufficient (mean = 3.8). Online test did help lesson review (mean = 3.4), but it did not help them get good grade (mean = 4.7). The mean of "Online project helped independence" (3.9) is higher than the average score of 3.5. The learners did think that extra online poetry links are useful (mean = 2.6) but they seemed to disagree with the statement that poetry links

helped knowledge (mean = 3.7). They tended to read announcement after logging in (mean = 2.6). They could understand the posted poems (mean = 3.5). They seemed to prefer discussing in Chinese to English (mean = 2.9 vs. 3). Surprisingly, the figures of mean for "Online learning is better than in-class learning" and "Since the project stopped, I've kept surfing," are 4 and 4.2.

As to the use of computer in online learning, students seemed quite satisfied with the way of taking online course in the computer language lab (mean = 2). They had no problem using the computer (mean = 2). They could record reading smoothly (mean = 2.4). They could upload the assignment easily (mean = 2.5).

Table 6 Learners' evaluation on online poetry learning

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. online w/o instructor	17	2.8235	2.9840
2. follow online schedule	17	2.6471	3.0607
3. complete online tasks	17	3.0000	2.8940
4. obey rules	17	2.7059	3.0365
5. punctual in class/submission	17	2.6471	3.0607
6. join online discussion	17	2.8235	2.9840
7. work on E-course after class	17	3.2353	2.7507
8. enough time working online	17	5.0588	2.3577
9. sufficient load of online tasks	17	3.8235	2.3247
10. online test helped lesson review	17	3.4706	2.3748
11. online test helped get good grade	17	4.7059	2.1437
12. poetry links helped knowledge	17	3.7647	2.3326
13. online learning is better than in-class learning	17	4.0588	2.3841
14. Since the project stopped, I've kept surfing.	17	4.2941	2.1144
15. extra online poetry links are useful	16	2.6875	1.2500
16. read announcement after logging in	16	2.6875	1.1383
17. could understand the posted poems	16	3.5625	1.2633
18. could discuss in English	16	3.0625	1.3401
19. discussed in Chinese	16	2.9375	1.3401
20. way of taking online course in W002	16	2.0000	0.8944
21. no problem using the computer	16	2.0000	1.0328
22. could record reading smoothly	16	2.4375	1.0308
23. could upload the assignment easily	16	2.5625	0.8139

Note: 1 represents the most satisfied and 7 represents the least satisfied.

Conclusion

In this study the writer shared the procedures of online poetry learning project, investigated its effectiveness and the possibility of using a teacher-made web site as an online course tool. The short-term experiment of online learning and classroom learning revealed that there was significant difference between the two types of

learning in terms of learners' performance of writing test when gender was considered. There was no statistical difference between the experiment group and the control group in terms of learners' performance of the midterm exam even though the former appeared to outperform the latter. As to the course platform, the class showed equal preference to the teacher-made web site and the professionally designed education web site like Blackboard.com. The participants seemed to disagree with the statement: Online learning is better than in-class learning; nevertheless, those who belonged to the lab group outperformed their counter group in the midterm exam. Technology-enhanced learning requires good preparation especially if the participants have never had such an experience. Partial online poetry learning might be available for the teenagers. In the study, students did gain confidence in using the computer devices in completing their tasks such as recording read-aloud, uploading assignment, and so on. Since online learning will become an inevitable learning style in this century, it is recommended that teachers provide students a chance to learn independently so that they may taste the modern online learning, or at least experience partial online learning, and find out if they are suitable to it. It is also a good chance for teachers to integrate a partial online learning into their syllabus in that educational technology has become a great trend in the field of education. A teacher-made web site may be considered as an official course tool in which the materials are well organized to fit the learners' needs and learning tasks are arranged to encourage learners' interaction. It is important for the writer to search for reasons of the shifting to irrelevant web sites in further study. It is hoped that this paper may invite more colleagues to design technology-enhanced learning for learners and provide learners an alternative way of learning. Furthermore, the research is hoped to lead to the possibility of a combination of traditional classroom learning and online poetry learning.

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